



November 8, 2007

Mr. Phillip Isenberg
Chair, Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force
650 Capitol Mall
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Isenberg:

This letter provides comments from the California Urban Water Agencies on the October 18, 2007 Delta Vision staff draft, "A Vision for California's Delta." CUWA is a coalition of 11 public water agencies that provide water to two-thirds of California's population. CUWA has been engaged in water resources and environmental issues in the Delta for more than 16 years, and has provided substantial support to research and implementation of many efforts to improve drinking water quality, supply reliability and a healthy ecosystem. We provided substantial written input on Delta Vision in letters dated March 27, 2006, March 31, 2006 and May 24, 2006. Many of our members are directly involved in the process through the Stakeholder Coordination Group as well as the related Bay-Delta Conservation Program.

We understand that various interests associated with the Delta Vision Stakeholder Coordination Group are providing detailed comments on specific aspects of this second Delta Vision staff draft. This new draft provides important new details that convey a clearer picture of where the Task Force may be headed. We believe it will be most useful to the Task Force for CUWA to provide input on some of the key general principles underlying the draft, with the expectation that they will be addressed in the planned November 22 third draft. Our comments follow in six separate categories: (1) near-term actions, (2) co-equal values, (3) future water exports, (4) storage, conservation and conveyance, (5) urgency and (6) governance.

Near-term Actions. We strongly agree with the Task Force concerns that near-term actions are essential to respond to ecosystem problems and water supply reliability. However, we are concerned that the Task Force sees this as separate from the Delta Vision. We believe that near-term actions are so critical to the "co-equal values" of the water system and the ecosystem that they must be a key component of the Vision. The strategic plan developed next year must include key actions to achieve the long-term Vision, including aggressive near-term actions. The long-term Vision cannot be accomplished without aggressive near-term actions. First and foremost is an immediate and aggressive program to limit water supply disruptions from potential seismic or other flooding events in the Delta.

There are also clear examples of near-term actions that are expected to provide benefits to both ecosystem and water supply values (see “co-equal values” discussion below). These include promising changes in Delta channel plumbing in and around Franks Tract, paired with re-operation of the Delta Cross Channel and other measures that help protect species and improve water supply reliability. Given the critical state of some aspects of the Delta ecosystem today, it is essential that near-term measures such as these be pursued in an aggressive manner. It is also time to take action on Delta island subsidence where opportunities exist, beyond simply trial programs, and to provide for critical levee improvements to protect both the export pumps and vital infrastructure. There are substantial lands in public ownership in the Delta where immediate actions could be taken that could benefit a wide range of the Delta’s uses being addressed by the Task Force.

Co-Equal Values. We greatly appreciate the attention to both water supply and ecosystem as having equally high priorities. We share the conclusion of the Task Force, after its thoughtful discussion at the September meeting, that instead of posing water supply and ecosystem as co-equal objectives that may be balanced at some suboptimal level for each, the achievement of objectives should be integrated as much as possible in an effort to move toward continual improvement of both. Behind this solid principle for a future Delta Vision, there needs to be more detail in the third draft at the end of November on what the unmet needs in both areas are. Worthy of consideration in furtherance of this principle is that, in the aggregate, projects that are implemented as part of the Delta Vision should be expected to provide net benefits to the Delta ecosystem.

Future Water Exports. The draft states that it should be expected that water exports will be reduced in the future. Reduced exports are a near-term consequence of recent actions to protect fisheries, including those mandated by court decisions. Current trends of expected sea-level rise, reduced snow pack and increased water use within the watersheds of the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys and Delta will also pose challenges to future export operations. However, there is no complete analysis or determination that would indicate that reduction must be expected over the long-term. The draft correctly states that “New storage and improved conveyance must be constructed to capture water at times least damaging to the environment”. When new storage, conveyance and the factors mentioned above are factored into the analysis, we will better understand the water supply and ecosystem potential of the system. The Delta Vision is a call to action, and reduced exports or system diversions should not be discussed in a way that implies this is a policy of the Vision or a requirement of the Task Force’s subsequent strategic plan; rather, the Vision should make clear that future outcomes have yet to be completely analyzed and evaluated as to their ability to meet future goals.

Storage, Conservation and Conveyance. We strongly support the recognition that additional storage, water use efficiency and Delta conveyance are all essential. There can be near-term and long-term aspects to each of these important tools. There should be stronger recognition of how each of these water management tools will advance both

ecosystem and water supply co-equal values. Whatever new projects are recommended, any impacts on fisheries and their migration must be mitigated in full compliance with state and federal law.

Urgency. While this is in part a recap of the need to take near-term actions, the Delta is in a state of crisis with respect to both its ecosystem and the water supplies which it supports. No users who rely on Delta waters – export or not – should be comfortable that they are immune from supply disruptions. There is an immediate urgency for near-term actions, as well as making a decision to develop and implement a long-term solution to secure protection from catastrophic levee failure, provide for environmental enhancement, and water supply reliability for California.

Governance. Consistent with our March 27, 2006 letter on Delta Vision to CALFED Executive Director Joe Grindstaff, we believe the governance structure developed to implement the Vision is very important. The draft presents just the beginning of this discussion and provides some basic principles. Not included in the discussion is the need for a governance structure that provides leadership and is capable of implementing the actions required. A governance structure that endlessly searches for consensus or continuously studies issues without taking action, in the CALFED model, should be avoided. Finally, there is a great deal of sensitivity as to the relationship between the governance structure and expenditure of funds provided by public agencies for the development and operation of projects in the Delta. The bundle of issues related to governance will be an important component of the Task Force's development of the strategic plan in 2008.

Many of our member agencies are providing additional comments directly to the Task Force. We appreciate your attention to the issues we raise, and look forward to working with you regarding the more detailed November 22 draft and the Task Force's subsequent decisions on November 29 and 30 on the Vision. Please let us know if you or your staff have questions or would like to discuss our comments further.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Piraino". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Paul" and last name "Piraino" clearly distinguishable.

Paul Piraino, Chair
CUWA Board of Representatives

cc: Walter J. Bishop, General Manager
Contra Costa Water District

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